Characters

- JUNE, twin
- JEAN, twin
- THEIR MOTHER
- THEIR FATHER
- DEAD AUNT ELLA
- JACKIE, their brother
- DR˙ BENJAMIN MAYS, President of Morehouse College
- JUNES GHOST

MANY OTHER CHARACTERS

ACT I

Easter, 1943

Christmas Eve, 1942 (four months earlier)

ACT II

December, 1941

November, 1974

Spring, 1947

(without intermission)

Act 1

Music Overture

At Open:

JUNE *and* JEAN *sit at piano practicingFür Elise.*

JUNE *takes out her autograph book, writes, and draws a willow tree.Sitting atop thewillow treeis a pretty girl of nineteen, humming. She hason a yellow organdy dress; she is* DEAD AUNT ELLA.

(DEAD AUNT ELLA *is one level above stage)* .

As ELLA *hums*, JUNE *writes and draws in her book* .

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Dining room. Easter morning, 1943. A stained glass windowof tulips. Through a side window, falling snow.

Table alreadyset for Easter dinner with white cloth and china. On radio WingsOver Jordan singMary, Dont You Weep.

(music,Mary, Dont YouWeep)

My sister, fragile in house dress, goes in and our of the diningroom. My nephew, Jackie, an angelical looking boy of six, sits at thetable holding his white Easter bunny.

MOTHER

Goodbye, June and Jean. Your fathers waiting for you in thecar.

(sound of car)

MOTHER

(continued)

This is the only time I can remember it snowingin Cleveland on Easter Sunday.

(Stage becomes church. Choir sings averse ofI Come to The Garden.)

MINISTER

On this day, Jesus arose.

CHOIR

I come to the Garden ...

DEAD AUNT ELLA

June and Jean hold Easter baskets, dolls, choir books andautograph books in which they write the history of their family.

JUNE

The miniature photographs and gilt-edged cards of Jesus that thechurch gave us in Sunday school hypnotized me. The colors, thecrimsons, blues, golds...the black of Jesuseyes.Jesus loves you,Sunday school teachers repeated, every Sunday, winter, spring andsummer.Jesus loves all little boys and girls.I saved the pictures ofthis Jesus into whose feet they had driven nails but who arose. Andwho loves me and my family. My book, Easter Sunday, 1943.

(She continues writing. The twins write and speak. They write in the pasttense as they are writing their history. They speak almost nervously.)

JEAN

(Writing)

Even in church we had our Easter baskets and our otherfavorite things. In out putse candy cigarettes, fingernail polish, aturquoise ring, our jacks and ball. And our autograph books. Wecouldnt carry our green ballerina dresses.

(On this Easter Sunday, thegirls wear pink cotton dresses.)

(AUNT ELLA *s voice, humming.)*

JUNE AND JEAN

Why do Negroes sing of sorrow? In the church inGeorgia where our cousins live the songs are even sadder. They aremoans.

JEAN

We also had our Sleeping Beauty books.

JUNE AND JEAN

We hope no one purs us to sleep for a hundred years.When we wake up, where would our parents and brother be?

MINISTER

Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits ofthem that slept. For since by man came death by man came also theresurrection of the dead.

JEAN

(Writing)

We were excited because that afternoon our father wasgoing to take us to hear Paul Robeson. We had seen him once andJune said, I realize one person can inspire many people to strength,courage and belief. We loved Paul Robeson. Our mother will stay athome with our brother and his bunny. His asthma was bad thatspring and, besides, our mother had been sick that winter.

MOTHER

Be a good girl.

(Theme music)

JUNE

(Writing)

In winter I was brought to her room by a neighborwho had been in the house all morning. My parentsdoor had beenclosed. And I was told to stay in my room. Suddenly I heard a loudsiren. My mothers door burst open, another neighbor had been insideher room. My father came running through the house followedby two men with a stretcher. My mother was lying in bed, her facewet, her hair limp. She looked like she was dying...the color of herskin was almost purple.

Be a good girl,she said and the men lifted her onto a whitestretcher and carried her to a large white ambulance.

My father disappeared with them. The siren sounded and theambulance took my mother away. I fled to the closet in my room,closed the door and started weeping. The neighbor made me openthe door.Your mother will be all right,she said.

Jean says our mother lost a child and almost died.

(Pause)

That Easter morning our father received an award, a civic awardfor helping the Negro youth of Cleveland. The *Plain Dealer* calledour father a gang buster. The article said my father had vision andhad changed the lives of underprivileged youth in the Cedar area ofCleveland.

MINISTER

And today one of Clevelands finest Negro leaders ...

(Fatherrises, goes to altar. He stands in light.)

JUNE AND JEAN

(Writing as they speak)

Our father saved people. Peopletalked of what a fine social worker he was and how many youngpeople he had helped set in the right direction. He raised money forY scholarships, helped the young find work and provided guidancethrough the Y programs.

He gave fine stirring speeches at meetings and banquets on thevalue of working hard for the Negro cause and helping Negro youth.He read us poetry of Negro poets and told me stories of Du Bois,Marian Anderson and Mary McCleod Bethune. He listened to ussing spirituals, which we loved and popular songs, which we alsoloved.

(Theme music)

JUNE

My father took me to church with him Easter Sunday. I carriedmy small Easter basket and wore a round straw hat with cherries onthe brim. It was wonderful to drive with my father in the car to theLane Metropolitan Church. I was happy.

We walked down the aisle into the church, a mammoth hall thathad once been a Jewish remple.

White flowers covered the altar and members of the choir worewhite as well. The minister preached violently of the crucifixion, Jesus,Judas, betrayal and finally Jesus Christ arising from the dead onEaster morning. My father started sobbing.

(My father who smiled,laughed, made jokes, whistled, teased me.)

Jesus had died a long time ago and he had arisen on Easter morning.Why was my father so very concerned about Jesus? I tried tohold his arm.

MINISTER

And now June and Jean will play for us.

(JUNE *and* JEAN *go down aisle to piano. They playWere YouThere?Afterward*, JUNE *stands up, speaks unexpectedly.)*

JUNE

And this is my sermon for the day. The Japanese: They bombedPearl Harbor and because of the Japanese, Roosevelt declared warand my mother was no longer at home at lunchtime because shewent to work at the war plant, Fisher Body. I had to make peanutbutter sandwiches for Jean and Jackie and take care of him from

twelve to one-fifteen when school starred again. It was because ofthe Japanese that my mother sprained her back at the war plant. Shehad to stay in bed for days. She limped, I was afraid.

(She continuesto speak uncontrollably.)

At home I have a slim yellow book on the piano that containsNegro spirituals. My mother often sings when she cooks Sundaymorning breakfast,Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.

(ESTELLE, *their mother, stands in her faded flower house dress andsings first lines ofMotherless Child.)*

In the summer of 1942 we moved into a new house in the popularGlenville section of Cleveland, far across the city from the MountPleasant area with Mr˙ Bertilonis grape arbor. These houses are larger.My parents even have a room with a fireplace, a room that is thelength of the house.

Its a *Now Voyager* room, I think when I enter and my mother issitting in her pink quilted bed jacket reading *Cosmopolitan* and eatingWhitmans chocolates

(evenings after she had completed herschool work).

Shes teaching elementary school and is completingher bachelors degree and has college classes at night.

In our new house there is a bookcase in the living room next tothe fireplace and on the bottom shelf are some old books left by theprevious tenants. One book is crimson, the same crimson color asmy mothers scrapbook, a thick volume with heavy pages entitled *The Poems of Percy Shelley* .

(JUNE *and* JEAN *return to their seats.)*

MINISTER

Thank you, June and Jean. Dr˙ Benjamin Mays, Presidentof Morehouse College, will lead us in prayer.

(Lights on DR˙ MAYS *)*

FATHER

(to UNE *and* JEAN *)*

Dr˙ Mays is a great man.

JUNE AND JEAN

What is a great man?

FATHER

Hes helping to lead American Negroes out of racial strife.

(Church fades .

AUNT ELLA *appears and vanishes .*

Sound of car .

Voices of MAYS *and the* FATHER.

JUNE *and* JEAN *singDeep Purple.)*

FATHER

(telling Mays about the section of Cleveland they live in. Thetwins tingDeep Purplelouder.)

Glenville was incorporated as a villageon October 4, 1870 and was annexed to the City of Clevelandon June 19, 1905. Glenville was once known as a resort of the wealthyand thegarden spotof Cuyahoga County. Glenville was born out

of an early Irish settlement on the lake shore between East Clevelandand Collinwood in 1893. Glenville got its name because thearea is full of shady, thick glens through which little streams tumbled.The first to settle in the Glenville area were early New Englandfarmers, followed by immigrants from Scotland, Ireland and England.over time the area grew into a secluded rural village and its lakeshore location made it a fashionable summer residence for Clevelandsaffluent families ...

(JUNE *and* JEAN *start singingChattanooga Choo-Choo.)*

JUNE

(Writing)

Our family: We took drives in my fathers Plymouthevery Sunday

(unless there was a blizzard)

after dinner, which was atthree oclock...in the summer, fried chicken, in the winter porkroast or roast beef. We started from Mount Pleasant, where we lived,drove out Kinsman, up Lee Road to Shaker Heights, through thewinding streets of Tudor mansions. Sometimes we drove downtownto Cedar Avenue, where my father had his offices at the Y.

The Y had aballroom,a large room painted blue where Jeanwould one day have her wedding reception and where, as a teenager,she saw our father give many talks at Y banquets. Down the hallfrom theballroomwere rooms where guesrs at the Y stayed ...small single bedrooms with plaid bedspreads and a desk. My brotherand I peeked into the rooms that were empty. How could I or anyof us know that it would be in one of these rooms where my fatherwould spend the last days of his life, sick from emphysema, divorcedfrom my mother and bereaved of his second wife?

(JEAN *singsIll Never Smile Againloudly.)*

But we didnt know that then as we peeked in the rooms, andran down the hallway to the stairway that led to the main floor andthe reception room, past the office that had a plaque on the doorwith my fathers name.

My father would greet us, rushing out of his office, smiling, andwed climb back into the 1937 Plymouth, where my mother waswaiting.Lets drive by Lake Erie,wed say. And so we would drivealong the lake until it got dark.Theyre going to build the lake upone day,my father always said. My mother would finally announcewe should go home. And when we got home, she, my brother and Ihad chilled Jello with bananas

and vanilla wafers that my motherhad carefully made the night before. My father smoked a cigar. I wasexcited and happy because soon Jack Benny would come on the radio,and we all loved Jack Benny and Eddie Anderson (Rochester).

JUNE AND JEAN

(For the first time, they try to address DR˙ MAYS. *)*

Dr˙Mays, we loveDeep Purplebut the songs we love the most arecamp songs. Our father is the YMCA camp director near ChagrinFalls. We love to watch him play baseball. He plays shortstop.

(Indistinct voices of FATHER *and* DR˙ MAYS. JUNE *and* JEAN *singfragments of:Let Me Call You Sweetheart,My DarlingClementine,And the Green Grass Grows All Around,Fight theTeam across the Field,Show Them Ohios Here.Keep the EarthReverberating with a Mighty Cheer,Rah-rah-rah,andGodBless America.)*

DEAD AUNT ELLA

After Easter. Dinner in the dining room.

JEAN

(Writing)

June and I had never seen a great man before. Thephone rang all afternoon. We could hear our mother say ...

MOTHER

Dr˙ Mays is here.

JEAN

(Writing)

My father and Dr˙ Mays continued to talk about theRace Problem. June and I were going with them to hear Paul Robesonat 3:00. We wrote it all in our book. I sangJimand June toldDr˙ Mays about Hitler. We wanted him to know we were prodigies.

(The voices of DR˙ MAYS *and* FATHER, *indistinct. From time totime they turn to laugh with the twins. The twins talkuncontrollably. Sometimes JEAN singsJim.)*

JUNE

(To DR˙ MAYS *)*

Dr˙ Mays, sometimes people say were a littletouched in the head. Were like Aunt Ella who used to climb up inthe willow trees down in Georgia and sing.

JUNE AND JEAN

We can be Mrs˙ Miniver, Annabel Lee and Bette Davis.

MOTHER

June and Jean, leave Dr˙ Mays alone.

JUNE AND JEAN

We knowLines above Tintern Abbey.

FATHER

When I was at Morehouse ...

(DR˙ MAYS *s voice is indistinct)*

FATHER

(continued)

When I was at Morehouse ...

(JUNE *speaks uncontrollably to* DR˙ MAYS *about Hitler. Sometimes* JEAN *singsJim.)*

JUNE

Dr˙ Mays, Hitler is the person who caused a tower to be built inthe school playground across the street from our house, a frighten-ing orange steel structure (a white light at its pinnacle shines atnight into our windows) that is surrounded by a jagged metal fencesaid to electrocute you if you touch it. This tower is a watch towerin case an attack from the Germans or the Japanese occurs.

Hitler causes my father to announce every evening from his armchair,as he reads the evening *Cleveland Press*,the siege of -----, the

killing of -----, che capture of -----, the bombing of -----, theworsening of the war.And in my mind, the possibility that fromthe tower the air raid warden will soon discover the enemy is marchinginto Ohio. Sometimes in the night I awake and stand at thewindow in my pajamas and watch the tower, bright orange andhideous in the night. Would the Germans come in the back door?In Mrs˙ Miniver a German came into the rear of the house. Wouldthey hide in the garage?

My Jewish friend, Yvette, says that Hitler doesnt like Jews andshe and her widowed mother are afraid. Hitler doesnt like anyoneexcept the Aryan race...the blond race. When I went to see themovie *Hitlers Children* with my brother and the kids from nextdoor, we were very upset that Bonita Granville was beaten by theSS, the German officers in their strangely designed uniforms, helmetsand boots. She was beaten with a whip because she didnt wantto fight for Hitler. We are children. If Hitler comes to Clevelandand we resist will we be beaten and sent to a concentration camp?

My mother says she is buying war bonds, and weve given upbutter and meat, we save coupons. I ask my Father when he comeshome at night, is that helping? I dont want the Nazis to come, Idont want to be a Hitlers Child or go to a camp. My best friendsaid as long as the tower is up we are in danger.

(JUNE *and* JEAN *interrupt each other. Sometimes* JEAN *singsJim.)*

JEAN

Dr˙ Mays, after Miss Eichenbaum told me of Chopin, even thoughIm not advanced enough to play the pieces, I bought a book ofpolonaises andstruggledwith sections of them.

In the evenings after I do my homework, I sit at the kitchentable and write penny postcards to the movie stars to get their autographedphotos. Toby, who sits in front of me in seventh-grade homeroom, gives me her list of movie studios: MGM, Universal, TwentiethCentury-Fox, Warner Brothers, David O˙ Selznick, that she hadcarefully copied on notebook paper. I carry the list in my school bagat all times with my fingernail polish, cologne and natural-colorTangee lipstick that I am allowed to have but not yet wear.

I love Frank Sinatra. On the Saturday night Hit Parade.

(FrankSinatra singsIll Never Smile Again.)

Orson Welles (in the movie of Jane Eyre), he is Edward Rochester,whom Jane Eyre loved, therefore I love him.

My classmates at Empire Junior High: like the kids at Lafayette,they have parents who were born in Europe, but in our newneighborhood, its not Italy but Poland, Hungary, Russia, Czechoslovakia.

JUNE

Dr˙ Mays, although I love my grandparents immensely, I hatethe train ride to Georgia that my brother and I take every June, especiallythe ride from Cincinnati to Montezuma in the dirty Jim Crowcar. When the TravelersAid meet us in Cincinnati station, mybrother is still crying. As soon as the train pulls out of the ClevelandTerminal Tower he starts to cry and he cries with his head on myshoulder.

Once my father bought me some magazines at the ClevelandTerminal. One was a *Modern Screen* with a picture of Clark Gable inArmy uniform. I tried to interest my brother in the magazine, buthe kept sobbing,I want to go home.I put my arm around mybrother, looked out of the dirty double-panel windows and clutchedthe *Modern Screen* magazine with Gable on the cover.

(FATHER *and* DR˙ MAYS *talk inaudibly, perhaps repeating,WhenI was at Morehouse...)*

JEAN

Dr˙ Mays, in 1942 my mother worked at the war plant on Sundays.Everything was different. We rode the Kinsman streetcar downto the Palace Theatre and saw Cab Calloway, Nat King Cole,Lionel Hampton and Lena Home. June and I in wedgies, gloves andhats; Jackie in long pants, shirt and tie. After the show our fatherpicked us up in the Plymouth.

(DR˙ MAYS *and* FATHER *exit to living room.)*

JUNE

Dr˙ Mays, did you see our Philco radio?

(JUNE *and* JEAN *hardly notice they have exited. They continuetalking to* DR˙ MAYS. *)*

JUNE AND JEAN

We litsten to Jack Armstrong, Tom Mix, Little OrphanAnnie, I Love a Mystery and Jack Benny. And send away for maps,rings, puzzles.

FATHER

(Laughing)

June and Jean, leave Dr˙ Mays alone.

JUNE AND JEAN

Dr˙ Mays, heres a picture of our father planting petuniasin the front of the lawn.

(Theme music)

JUNE

(Absently, to DR˙ MAYS *)*

People my mother dreams about: In themorning I can hardly wait to hear about them. The stories she tellsof them are all as exciting as the movies of Frankenstein and Draculathat I see at theWaldorf.

(JUNE *leaves the stage.)*

JEAN

These people my mother dreams about continue to grow in myimagination. Like the people in the red scrapbook, they often knoweach other and knew my parents when they were young. I list themin my mind as I sit on che front steps of our house

(the steps thatface the orange tower).

Her mother who died when she was three.

Her stepfather who was killed walking across an electrified railroadtrack.

Her Aunt Hattie who died when my mother was pregnant withme.

When my mothers making oatmeal on winter mornings as I sitwaiting with my bowl at the kitchen table, l secretly yearn that shelltalk more about people she dreams about.

(Brown Derby music,Siboney)

JEAN

(Writing)

June took off her Easter dress and came downstairs inmy mothers long dotted Swiss dress.

JUNE

(Returns in dotted Swiss dress)

I keep stacks of *Modern Screen* inthe vanity table drawer and make a scrapbook from my favorite pictures.I especially like pictures of people at parties in evening dress.And I keep another scrapbook on Ingrid Bergman. How marvelousto have a Swedish accent and a radiant smile.

Sometimes when no one is at home, I go to the attic and get thisold blue-and-white dotted Swiss evening gown and try it on and sitat my vanity table with my movie photos lined up in the mirror anddaydream ol

being at the Brown Derby.

(JUNE *might comb her hairdifferently.)*

MOTHER

June, go back upstairs and put on your Easter dress.

(JUNE *leaves.)*

JEAN

(Writing)

Our brother had one of his asthmatic attacks and ourmother rushed upstairs ro get him steam and vapor.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

They gather around him and hold the towel over his head.Radio plays,Oh, Johnny.

(Radio playsOh, Johnny.One actor should imitate Wee BannieBaker . JUNE *returns with Easter dress on.)*

JEAN

(Writing)

Before we left my father and Dr˙ Mays looked at photographsof Morehouse and Atlanta University.

MOTHER

June and Jean, would you play a piece for Dr˙ Mays?

(Twins go to piano and playFür Elise.)

JUNE

(She stands, day dreaming)

In a few minutes well see Paul Robeson.

(Imagined ROBESON *enters stage center. He sings beginning ofWaterboy.Music fades. Sound of car* .

Interlude .

Theme music continues. Music can convey JUNE *s vision of thefuture.)*

JUNE

(Writing)

We drove past Lakeview Cemetery where my fatherand brorher will be buried. And the school where my brother *will* run the fifty-yard dash and win the state championship.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

The car swerves.

JUNE

I cant stop thinking of Lakeview Cemetery where my brotherand father *will* be buried.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Car swerves again and rolls over in snow.

VOICES OF DR˙ MAYS AND FATHER

(Callig)

June and Jean. June. Jean.

JUNE

(Barely coherent)

Before he joins the Army Jackie will go to OhioState where he will run track. He stands beneath Jeans window inBaker Hall and practices his Spanish. It will be spring when he leavesfor Germany. He leaves from Fort Dix and thats where Jean willnext see him, seventeen months later.

VOICES OF DR˙ MAYS AND FATHER

(Calling them)

June and Jean.

JUNE

On his last night in New York he will go to see *Pajama Game* .When Jean is in her twenties she will secretly call herself a lyric poet.Our father will say, on a visit to New York,The sun? You meanyoure writing about the sun?Yes, she will smile. They will be at theGreyhound bus station. Hes on his way back to Atlanta where helives after the death of his second wife, who dies in a car crash.

VOICES OF DR˙ MAYS AND FATHER

(Calling them)

June, and Jean.

JUNE

My mother had always said holding her family together was themost important thing in the world. Yet they will divorce one springin 1961. Suddenly that spring Jesus will become a character in theplay Jean will write, and a surprising Jesus, a punishing Jesus, berserk,evil, sinister. She will remember how so long ago when we all tookdrives, when we had sat at the campfire together or listened to JackBenny, I had seen Jesus as sweet, docile. She had believedwhat afriend we have in Jesus.But that spring, sitting in the PensioneSabrina, she will go on creating a cruel Jesus Christ.

VOICES OF DR˙ MAYS AND FATHER

(Calling)

June and Jean.

JUNE

After his second wife dies, my father will visit Jean in New York.

FATHER

Can I come live with you, Jeannie? Please let me come livewith you.

JUNE

This will be the winter before Jackie goes for a drive in his carand is in the accident. He is in a coma for five months. When heawakes he *will* be brain damaged.

My grandmother, my great aunt: Their houses surrounded bypetunias, hedges, sunflowers, magnolia trees, their wells, their blue-and-whitedishes, the dippers and bucket, their pot-bellied stoves,the way the houses sat on the Georgia roads...the picket fences...these houses with their vistas of cornfields, vegetable gardens, figtrees, flower gardens that faced che road, the porches that woundaround the house, the stone paths that led to the steps...these houseswere the most beautiful houses in the world to me. Before he dies,my father will return to these places.

(Theme music has continued in this section)

VOICES OF DR˙ MAYS AND FATHER

(Calling)

June and Jean.

FATHER

The girls are trapped.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Dining room. Evening.

FATHER

The girls were trapped inside the car twenty minutes when thecar rolled over into a snow drift down Snake Hill.

JEAN

(Writing)

My mother rushed to help us and gave us hot cocoa.She had been out in the snow searching for our brother who let hisbunny run onto che porch and chased after him. Our father droveDr˙ Mays back to the hotel.

(Judy Garland sings,Easter Parade.)

JUNE

(Holds her head. Still dazed but speaking loudly. She continues tosee the future.)

What I see, Easter evening, 1943:My fathers death bed. It will be winter.

FATHER

When I was a boy...Papa...Mama...My Aunt Mary Lee...when I was a boy...Mama, Papa, Ill see them soon.

(JUNE *stands speaking.)*

JUNE

When I went to Georgia, I slept in his boyhood room. The windowfaced a small corn field, the room was exactly as it was whenmy father was a boy. A brass bed, a marble night stand with a blueand white pitcher and basin, a mahogany dresser, a hooked rug besidethe bed.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Then June sees my sister pushing Jackie in a wheelchair.

(JUNE *cries and runs out.)*

JEAN

Before we could stop June, she jumped or fell off the upstairsporch. We buried my twin sister three days after Easter.

(Interlude)

DEAD AUNT ELLA

(appears)

Everything she saw came true. Now Junes Ghostremembers Christmas eve, 1942. Five months earlier.

(JUNEs GHOST *appears. She wears dotted Swiss dress.Bing CrosbysingsWhite Christmas)*

DEAD AUNT ELLA

(continued)

She remembers her frail mother wearing aflowered house dress and a Christmas apron rushing in from thekitchen with a poinsettia. And Jean, dressed in her green ballerinadress setting the table with the china plates with flowers, the sameplates they will use far Easter, 1943.

Junes Ghost wears her Brown Derby dotted Swiss evening gown.She writes, too.

Act 2

SCENE

(JUNEs GHOST *watches* JUNE. *Theme music.)*

JUNE

(Writing)

Sometimes after I finish my homework, I sit on thefloor beside the bookcase and stare at the pretty old scarlet volume,and leaf through its thick pages. One poem caught my eye. I read itmany times:

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory,
Odors, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead.
Are heaped on the beloveds bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

Last Christmas my grandmother died. She died days before Christmas.On Christmas our house was sad. We returned from her funeralin Georgia, where my father had thrown himself on her flower-heapedcoffin and sobbed. That Christmas day he hadnt comedownstairs. It was early evening. I sat down by the bookcase, tookout the crimson Shelley volume and read:Music, when soft voicesdie...

I remember how amazing and wonderful it was to stay in my fathersroom at my grandmothers house every summer. When Iawakened each summer morning, I looked out of the same window,onto the same corn field that my father had looked at when he hadawakened. In the front room were pictures of my father as a boy

Act 2

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I loved these rooms: My fathers room and my grandmothersfront room with its leather settees and Victrola and the parlor at mygrear-aunts house that we were allowed in only one hour on Sunday,a room of settees, ferns, china cabinets and photographs of mygrandmothers five sisters.

(Writing)

My mother often told me that she had been sent away to boardingschool at the age of five and remained there until she was seventeen.Her mother was dead and her father thought boarding schoolwas the best course for her. On Christmas holidays, she said, shewould get very lonely and the headmaster of the school (in Fort Valley,Georgia) would invite her to his house.

(JUNES GHOST *watches from a distance.)*

MOTHER

June and Jean, the Christmas play is in an hour. And whereis your brother?

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Winston rushed in from outside with the Christmas tree.

(Nat King ColesingsChristmas Song.)

MOTHER

Where is your brother?

JEAN

Hes upstairs sitting on the porch watching for Santa Claus.

JUNE

I hope hes not reading my secret books.

(Light on JACKIE *on another level)*

JACKIE

My Secret Book, by June.

Dracula: even though he likes blood, he is noble and even livesin a castle.

Because of his nobility he can turn into a tiny bat and kill andmake people grow fangs. He is Bela Lugosi.

Sherlock Holmes: He is Basil Rathbone; he lives in a place calledBaker Street in London.

Then there is *The Invisible Man, Jack the Ripper* and *The Womanin Black* .

Abe Lincoln: Although he grew up in a log cabin, he becamePresident and freed my forbears from slavery. Yet he had a mad wife.

My mother: She tells me stories of her life in Georgia. She taughtme the alphabet when I was three, and she taught me to read thatsame year. She encourages me to compete with my Jewish, Polish,Italian and black classmates in elementary school, and took pride inthe accomplishments of my gold and silver stars. She continued toencourage me to read, and by the fifth grade I had read all the books

in the school library. She shares her secret thoughts and tears overthe movies she takes me to see. She collected photographs of herand my fathers youth in Atlanta and keeps them in scrapbooks sothat I am able to imagine my parents as they were when they wereyoung. She instills in me the desire to excel.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Downstairs Winston stares at a tree. Suddenly he starts towhistle. He decorates the tree with colored lights. He goes outsideagain. Snow blows into the hallway.

(Sound of whistling)

Jean brings in a pink cake. Estelle presents a white cake. The diningroom glows. Poinsettia, candles, mistletoe, silver, china.

MOTHER

June, its time to get dressed.

(JUNEs GHOST *watches)*

JUNE

My father spoke at his mothers funeral.

FATHER

(Staring up at tree)

My mother was a quiet woman. She had asmall, almost frail body but was endowed with a heart of gold. Whenshe died last Thursday of her heart attack, she was preparing her annualChristmas box to send us in Cleveland.

JUNE

(Still writing)

My parents I envy them. To me they possess aglamour. They drink highballs and smoke cigarettes, read *Crisis* magazineand the *Pittsburgh Courier* ...are members of the NAACP andthe Urban League, members of the Alphas, Kappas, the AKAs, theDeltas and Sigmas, play bridge, poker, tonk. They have social clubswhose doings are reported in the *Cleveland Call* and *Post* . They loveformal dances (especially at holidays), Lena, Duke, Cab; worship A.Philip Randolph, Paul Robeson, W˙ E˙ B˙ DuBois. Marian Anderson,Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson and Mary McLeod Bethune.They are devoted ro theNegro Cause.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Winston returns with a star for the tree.

JUNE

Miss Bell A fourth-grade teacher. She told my mothet I wouldhave anervous breakdownif I didnt stop trying to be the best ineverything in class. My mother said I had to stop reading so much; Ihad to go outside and play. She made me sit on the front porch andrefused to let me take my *Katy Did* books with me. I heard mymother tell my father what Miss Bell said as they disappeared intothe kitchen. When my father came out of the kitchen he smiled atme and asked me would I like to go for a drive in the car (my favoritething) and buy some ice cream. I could get Neapolitan(strawberry, chocolate, vanilla), my favorite kind.

MOTHER

Go get your brother so we can singHappy Birthdaytohim.

(Lights up on JACKIE. *Family sings last lines ofHappy Birthday.Judy GarlandsingsHave Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.)*

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Junes Ghost remembers herself and Jean in blue coats andleggings. June carrying her Virgin Mary costume and Baby Jesus dolland song:Up on the House Top.

(Actors at music stands play finger bells, tambourines, piano,

elementary school instruments .

Sound of sang, JUNE *and* JEAN.

Stage becomes scene.)

The school play. A lit stage, the manger, the starry sky, the fields,the animals, blues, gold, crimson.

(The stage has become scene. Lights almost white. From far away,through the starry night comes JUNE *slowly in her white VirginMary costume. She falters. In the starry night they come. Slowly.Piano music,Away in a Manger.* JUNE, *the Virgin Mary, comescloser. She smiles.)*

(fade)

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Junes Ghost remembers.

(Voices of the choir singWhenIve Done the Best I Can.)

Days before Christmas, 1941. Montezuma, Georgia. Within thewhite wooden church with stained glass windows. A door to the rearof the altar leads to thecoloredcemetery. A corn field is beyond.Birds fly throughout the church, through the rear doorway is sunlight.The dark altar encircled by a banister is covered with gladiolusand carnations. And in front of the altar is the open casket of Junesand Jeans grandmother.

Winston suddenly throws himself across the casket.

(Choir voices continue .

JUNES GHOST *watches herself and her family .*

They wear dark coats.)

JEAN

My parentshometown: Montezuma, Georgia looked to me likethe drawings we were given in Sunday School of Jerusalem, thegolden and red and white colors of the landscape, the processions ofpeople walking on the road coming from the fields, walking to church,winding roads, view of steeples.

When I walked up the road with my grandmother to the whitewooden church, I felt we were in a holy procession like the peopleon the Sunday school cards...the golden-red road, the blue sky, theneighbors walking ahead of us. One day I would see a book of Giottoprints and think of these processions on the road. And use his colors

in my stories, not realizing how I had connected the Sunday schoolcard colors, the Georgia landscape colors and colors of Giotto.

My grandmother made biscuits and fried fish for breakfast followedby a dipper full of mineral water from the well at the foot ofthe road.

(Faint voices of choir .

Fade.)

DEAD AUNT ELLA

(appears)

Cleveland, November 1974. Room in YMCAwhere Winston was once executive secretary. Single bed, plaid bedspread.On the wall he has a picture of himself (in 1938) diggingthe cornerstone of the YMCA with Cleveland ministers. On a chestis a photograph of his deceased second wife. He suffers from emphysema.He will die soon.

Enter Jean and Junes Ghost. They all embrace. Junes Ghost sitsnext to Jean. Jean cannot see Junes Ghost..

(As she watches her father,Jean remembers ministers voice Easter Sunday, 1943.)

MINISTER

And on this Easter morning, 1943, one of Clevelands finestNegro leaders, this young man with vision, came to Cleveland nineyears ago and has become Clevelands number one Gang Buster. Hehas transformed Cleveland gangs into Clubs for Boys. In a sectionof the city noted for its police problems, he is turning delinquencyinto constructive activity.

JUNE

(Remembers staring at her father)

our family: We took drives inmy fathers Plymouth every Sunday (unless there was a blizzard) afterdinner, which was at three oclock...in summer, fried chicken, in thewinter, pork roast or roast beef. We started from

Mount Pleasant.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Winston holds clippings of his work from the 1930s, 1940s *Cleveland Press*, from pages of June and Jeans autograph books andhis Metropolitan Life Insurance policies.

FATHER

Every afternoon I read your and Junies Junior High Schooldiaries. When I left Cleveland in 1961 I found pages in the vanitytable in your old room.

(Reading JUNE *s diaries, laughing.)*

Junior High, 1943: My father often called me good-looking whenin the mirror I saw a strange-looking face.

(JUNES GHOST *speakswith him. Theme music.)*

I thought I looked funny in my plaid skirts and white blouseswith my straightened hair curled in tiny curls.

FATHER

Jean, here ate your diaries.

(JUNES GHOST *speaks with him.)*

Roosevelt and Churchill: They were meeting. I saw it in thenewsreel at the Waldorf Theatre. They were meeimg to stop the

war, they were sitting in chairs smiling. Churchill had a cigar andPresident Roosevelt smoked a cigarette with a long holder. Theywere here, there, they were in Yalta. How, I wondered, could they,sitting in chairs smiling, stop the Germans? My farher had told methat the Germans were invading all of Europe. I was very worried;then my father told me the Russians were going to help. The Russianswere going to help us.

The Russians (the Russian Bear): My father was smiling, the newspaperunder his arm as he strode into the house. The Russian Bear isstopping Hitler. Then Paris was liberated. We wouldnt have to usecoupons to buy butter or meat. We wouldnt have to wonder whetherwe were eating horse mear. And most of all, I wouldnt have toworry about being taken from my parents to be a Hitlers Child. Wecould go peacefully back to roller skating on the sidewalk and readingcomics on the front porch. Soon they would take the tower down.

(FATHER *laughs. He clutches his daughters diaries* . JUNES GHOST *writes.)*

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Sun . The play Jean is writing for her father and Malcolm X.

(The FATHER *appears stage center, as we first saw him, EasterSunday, 1943. Excerpts from* JEAN *s plays have separate musicmotif.)*

FATHER

(as Jean envisions him)

My head, the head of Christ,

The head of an apostle, head of Sr, Anne, head of the
Virgin, head of Infant Jesus.
My head dismembered.
...
No, I still dream.
Children. The body and arms of a child.
When a new sun appears.
I think before I was bornmy mother dreamed she saw me in the sunthen the sun went down.
And at night I appear within the moon.
I keep thinkingflowers and water viewsof a coast of Italy
Yet all is in imbalance.
No, I must think of trees.
The Star of Bethlehem.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Jean didnt read Winston lines from another play at thePublic Theatre.

(JEAN *stage center. In this period she wears dark skirt and sweater.)*

JEAN

It was the War.
Our father said everyone was getting hung and shot in Europe.
America wouldnt be safe long.
...
Remember we lived in a holy chapel with parents.
Jesus, Joseph, Mary.
...
People said we were the holiest children.
...
Why did the War start?
I want to hang myself.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Near Christmas, 1974, a month later. Hospital room. Winstonis lying on his death bed. Jean sits by his side. A December day.Junes Ghost sits too.

FATHER

Jeannie, Im reading about your play at the Public Theatre intodays New York *Post* . Im taking it back to Georgia. It quotes yousaying,I wrote a poem for my father and Malcolm X called *Sun* .And then you talk about your writing. And you quote from a playcalled *Lesson in Dead Language* .

JEAN

A Pupil raises her hand.

Pupil: I bleed, Teacher, I bleed. It started when my white dogdied. It was a charming little white dog. He ran beside me in thesun when I played a game with lemons on the green grass. And itstarted when I became a woman. My mother says it is because I ama woman that I bleed. Why, Mother, why do I bleed?

They raise their hands.

Pupils (In unison): My mother says it is because I am a womanthat I bleed. Blood comes out of me.

White Dog: Since we do not know the one that killed the sun,we will all be punished. We will all bleed, since we do not know theone, we will all be punished.

The Pupils stand in the aisle, backs to audience. Silence. Theyeach have a great circle of blood on the back of their dresses.

NURSE

Your fathet is having hallucinations about his dead child Juneand his deceased second wife. He talks about Georgia and the daylast year his childhood home burned down. He keeps talking about

his son Jackie, who was in a coma and is now in a wheelchair out inHighland View Hospital. And he again and again, constantly talksabout June, who jumped or fell off the upstairs porch Easter Sunday,1943.

(Sound of FATHER *whistling,Let Me Call You Sweetheart.)*

(Fade)

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Jean still remembers spring, 1947. Drama room, GlenvilleHigh School. A room lined with theatre books, a case of SamuelFrench editions, moveable desks and, at the front, a stage.

(Voices of high school choral club singing Rodgers and Hart.Manhattan.)

Seated before the stage is Jean, dressed in a jumper, a white ruffledblouse, Studying *Jane Eyre* . Junes Ghost studies *Jane Eyre* too, besideJean.

JEAN

(Writing)

After Junes death, my mother would sometimes disappearto the hallway steps outside the kitchen and close the door behindher. I could hear her crying. When she came back into thekitchen, she wouldnt speak but would dry the dishes or peel potatoesfor dinner. Sometimes she went to the basement and cried.

(Distant voices of choral club,In a Mountain Greenery.)

In our drama class we read *Our Town, Night Must Fall, The PetrifiedForest* and *Street Scene* . Mr˙ Davis told us about his summerand holiday trips to New York where he saw Broadway plays. In thefinal project we had to do a ten-minute characterization from a play.I asked Mr˙ Davis could I read from *Jane Eyre* .

(Voices of choral club singingOklahoma.)

MR. DAVIS

Today we do characterizations.

JEAN

(JUNES GHOST *speaks with* JEAN *)*

I wore a matoon-colored velvetjumper and a white ruffled blouse, trying to dress up like JoanFontaine in the movie. I had read the passage over and over andmemorized it

(the moment when Jane leaves Rochester)

. It was theonly time in my life I publicly had a chance to become Jane Eyre.Even I could feel the passion I evoked in the class.

MR. DAVIS

You have imagination.

(Theme music)

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Later that night in the dark dining room. Jean sits studying *Silas Marner* . My sister enters. Junes Ghost sits next to Jean.

MOTHER

Remember when June wrote a penny postcard to OrsonWelles? She gave it to me to read. It said,Dear Mr. Welles, I likedyou in *Jane Eyre* . Please send me an autographed photo.

JUNES GHOST

It arrived one lovely June day in a white envelope, alarge 5 by 7 picture, not the usual 2 by 3 size of other photos, especiallythose from MGM. It was signed in real-looking ink, OrsonWelles. I convinced myself it was original. Before I could mount itin my scrapbook Jackie got peanut butter on it. I started to cry.

MOTHER

June sat right here.

(She points to where JUNES GHOST *is sitting* .JUNES GHOST *stares at her mother. Theme music.)*

JUNES GHOST

(Writing)

I thought my motherchildhood life verystrange. Everyone I knew went to a public school and I had neverever seen a boarding school, thatone was sent away to.It was verydifficult for me to imagine even though my mother spoke of it often.Finally when I was eleven I took a book out of the school librarythat was gray with green design--a pretty book, I thought--and itwas called *Jane Eyre* .

Almost before the first chapter was concluded, it was decidedthat the heroine, Jane Eyre, would besent away to boarding school.How excited I was as I sat in the small rocking chair in my room.Here was a little girl who had a life like my mothers. It was sothrilling that I read the first section about Jane Eyre at Lowoodmany times. I began to envy my mothers exotic upbringing. It wasntfair that I would go every day to Lafayette Public School whenshe lived a life like Jane Eyres.

As much as it was possible, I used to imagine that I had been mymother when she was a little girl. I think

after *Jane Eyre*, when shetold me stories, I almost believed they had happened to me: her lifeat boarding school, her pictures in the red scrapbook of herself inwhite organdy dresses standing by a Model T Ford, the people inher dreams and maybe most of all her incredibly pretty hair thateveryone commented on. I think now that I often thought theywere mine. They all belonged to me.

(JUNES GHOST *vanishes.)*

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Estelle went out. Her descending steps were heard. Thenthe sound of her crying in the basement. Suddenly, for the firsttime, Jean sees Junes Ghost. She is atop the willow tree with me.

Winston comes rushing in.

FATHER

Jeannie, your mother and I may get a divorce.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

He disappears upstairs.

(JUNES GHOST *appears from atop thewillow treein Georgia* .

JEAN *now sees* JUNES GHOST *)*

JUNES GHOST

Jean, Aunt Ella tells me about our father.

JEAN

(Staring at her sister)

our Aunt Ella whos touched in the head?And sings in the willow tree in Georgia?

JUNES GHOST

Yes.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

When Winston was a young man at Morehouse, he felthimself to be in the midst of winged spirits. He had such poignantreligious vision of himself. Such ideals.

(JUNE *hears* ELLA *s voice and now for the first time sees* AUNT

ELLA.

ELLA *and* JUNES GHOST *appear on upper level* . JEAN *stands stagecenter looking up at them.)*

JEAN

Aunt Ella...

(Theme music)

June, three years after you died, we saw Paul Robeson at St˙ JamesChurch. It was just as you imagined.

(ROBESON, *stage center, completesWater Boy.)*

Philipps Schuyler came the next spring.

(Classical piano music, Schumann played by SCHUYLER *)*

I didnt go to our recital the week after you died. We never get achance to playFür Elise.

(Music fades)

JUNES GHOST

Jean, if you look in the vanity table in our room in thelower left hand drawer underneath the rose colored wallpaper thatlines the drawer you will find Aunt Ellas writing. She used to bringit to me in the middle of the night.

(AUNT ELLA *sings softly,Go Down Moses.)*

JEAN

Hello, Aunt Ella.

(Sound of ESTELLE *crying in the basement.)*

FATHER

I want to talk to you. Your mother and I may get a divorce. Iwant to go back home to Georgia.

JEAN

Hello, Aunt Ella. Do you still sing in trees?

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Yes.

JUNES GHOST

Jackie knows about our fathers future second wedding.Jackie always read the pages Aunt Ella gave me. Thats why hewheezes. Aunt Ella says she talks to our father early in the morningsas he dreams of being back in his boyhood room. She says he stickshis head out of the window that faces the corn field and the corngrows so close that his head is in the middle of two stalks. Aunt Ellasays sometimes she sat with us on the porch swing.

FATHER

I have a memory of Mama coming through the parlor doorwith a lamp in her hand.

JEAN

June, often I think of us with our decoder rings sitting by thePhilco radio waiting for a message from Jack Armstrong.

DEAD AUNT ELLA

Jean, your mother suffered two miscarriages. Her auntdied in39 and on the morning of her funeral after riding ninehundred miles on the train in Estelles fifth month she lost a secondchild. It like to killed her and then the Cleveland school systemwasnt hiring many Negro teachers. There was a strict quota and shecouldnt get a job. She fell into a state that was so different from anystate she had ever been in. Remember she took to dressing in hernightgown and lost all touch with Winston and his work.

And your father, remember at the dedication of the new Y everyonehad walked about the polished rooms filled with baskets offlowers congratulating him. The press was there flashing bulbs. Inthe midst of the congratulations he had gone to the roof. No onehad known whether he was trying to catch a bird or trying to hushtheir moaning or trying to commit suicide. He had fallen on thescaffold, broken his arm and been rescued.

(Silence. Room very dark . AUNT ELLA *fades.)*

JUNES GHOST

Jean, get the pages from the vanity table on our lives.Aunt Ellas calling me.

(JUNES GHOST *vanishes .*

AUNT ELLA *sings;Go Down Moses,Tell Old Pharaoh Let My*

People Go--one line.)

JUNE

(appears)

(as she was Easter, 1943)

Farewell for now, my sister.Write everything down for us. Before I go Jackie knows our fatherwill try to kill himself the night of his testimonial dinner. He readAunt Ells pages.

(Sound of JACKIE *wheezing loud)*

JEAN

Junie, I still have your movie star scrapbook. Please dont go. Wecould write away to the movie studios tonight.

JUNE

Remember how we used to sing,Would you like to swing on astar?

(She vanishes .

Faint melody:Would you like to swing on a star?)

(The End)